

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
HiLine District Office
1101 15th Street North
Great Falls, MT 59401**

**Decision Record and Leasing Recommendation
(Malta Field Office and Glasgow Field Office)
DOI-BLM-MT-M010-2012-0026-EA**

Decision:

It is my decision to implement the Preferred Alternative as identified in the HiLine District Office Oil and Gas Leasing Environmental Assessment (EA) EA-DOI-BLM-MT-M010-2012-0026-EA, in which 4 of 153 parcels containing approximately 1,107.13 acres of federal minerals would be offered for lease at the October 23, 2012 competitive sale. Competitive leases will be issued for parcels sold at the sale, and noncompetitive leases may be issued for applications filed during the 2-year period following the sale. The remaining 149 parcels containing approximately 67,204.35 federal mineral acres (64,630.71 Valley; 2,573.64 Phillips) in whole or part would be deferred due to valuable wildlife habitat and are pending further review in the HiLine Resource Management Plan.

Authorities:

The authority for this decision is contained in 43 CFR 3100.

Compliance and Monitoring:

Should the parcels be developed, monitoring may be required and would be addressed and analyzed under future NEPA documentation.

Terms, Conditions, and Stipulations:

For all parcels, standard terms and conditions, as well as the lease notices and stipulations identified by parcel in Appendix A of the EA, would apply and be attached to the lease parcel(s).

Plan Conformance and Consistency:

The proposed action and alternatives have been reviewed and found to be in conformance with the following BLM plans and associated Record of Decision(s): Phillips Management Framework Plan (MFP) (1977), and the Oil & Gas Environmental Assessment of BLM Leasing Program – Lewistown District September 1981. Although the Judith-Valley-Phillips (JVP) Resource Management Plan (RMP), as amended, was approved in 1994, it did not make decisions relative to leasing of fluid minerals due to a protest on the 1992 Final RMP that called for a supplemental EIS to address an alternative that would avoid oil and gas leasing in areas with valuable wildlife habitat.

Alternatives Considered:

No Action Alternative. The No Action Alternative would exclude all 153 parcels within the HiLine District from the lease sale. Surface management would remain the same and ongoing oil and gas development would continue on surrounding federal, private, and state leases.

BLM Preferred Alternative. The preferred alternative would be to offer 4 of 153 parcels containing approximately 1,107.13 acres of federal minerals for competitive and/or noncompetitive lease issuance. The lease parcels to be offered are located within the Malta and Glasgow Field Offices and are dispersed across the following counties: Phillips and Valley. Standard terms and conditions, as well as stipulations identified in Appendix A of the EA would apply.

Alternatives Considered, but eliminated from further analysis: 149 parcels containing approximately 67,204.35 federal mineral acres in whole or part would be deferred from the upcoming lease sale. More specifically, the 149 lease parcels [64,630.71 acres in Valley County and 2,573.64 acres in Phillips County] have been found to contain valuable wildlife habitat and are being analyzed in the ongoing HiLine RMP effort.

Public Comments:

This EA was made available for a 30-day public comment period which ended on June 30, 2012. No substantive comments were received after the 30-day comment period from the public; however, after an internal review of the EA, some modifications have been made to the EA. Changes made to the analysis are noted with gray-scale shading and/or strikeout so the modifications to the EA can easily be identified. Refer to Chapter 5 of the updated EA for a summary of public participation and changes made to the EA.

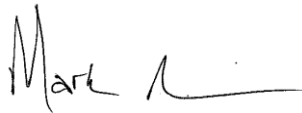
Rationale for the Decision:

The decision to approve the BLM Preferred Alternative is based on the following: 1) consistency with resource management and land use plans; 2) national policy; 3) agency statutory requirements; 4) relevant resource issues; and 5) application of measures to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

1. The decision is in conformance with the Phillips Management Framework Plan (MFP) (1977), and the Oil & Gas Environmental Assessment of BLM Leasing Program – Lewistown District September 1981. Although the Judith-Valley-Phillips (JVP) Resource Management Plan (RMP), as amended, was approved in 1994, it did not make decisions relative to leasing of fluid minerals due to a protest on the 1992 Final RMP that called for a supplemental EIS to address an alternative that would avoid oil and gas leasing in areas with valuable wildlife habitat
2. It is the policy of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) as derived from various laws, including the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920, as amended [30 U.S.C. 181 *et seq.*] and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, to make mineral resources available for disposal and to encourage development of mineral resources to meet national, regional, and local needs.

3. The decision is consistent with all federal, state, and county authorizing actions required for implementation of the Preferred Alternative.
4. Standard terms and conditions as well as special stipulations would apply. Lease stipulations (as required by Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations 3101.1-3) were added to each parcel as identified by the Malta and Glasgow Field Offices to address site specific resource concerns or new information not identified in the planning process.

Recommended by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark K. Albers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Mark K. Albers, District Manager
Date October 19, 2012

Concur and Approved by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Theresa M. Hanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Theresa M. Hanley, Deputy State Director, Division of Resources
Date October 19, 2012